



# The Atlantic Alliance: A View from the Pentagon

By WILLIAM S. COHEN

**O**n last Veterans Day I joined in honoring those who have served the Nation in uniform. In cities and towns across North America and Europe, we also commemorated the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of World War I. A veteran who had been on the front on November 11, 1918, described the moment when the guns fell silent; how men on both sides slowly, cautiously lifted their heads, how for the first time in four years they were able to stand up outside their squalid trenches.

But in the years that followed, that hopeful moment of peace was lost by leaders who failed to realize their common destiny and the need for free

people to stand up and to defend one another. As a result, a quarter century after the end of World War I, Europe faced an even more terrible conflict and a shadow was once again falling over the continent. But in the wake of World War II the West responded before it was too late. By establishing NATO, we finally embraced collective defense, a concept that has been at the core of our transatlantic partnership for fifty years.

## Emerging Consensus

Today the shadow of a global conflict no longer exists. The Alliance is strong, successful, and growing. Europe is both free and undivided for the first time. And our values are advancing on every continent. At the same time, the world remains dangerous, a landscape of rogue regimes, rekindled

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The Honorable William S. Cohen is the twentieth Secretary of Defense and previously represented the State of Maine in the U.S. Senate.

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SFOR troops on parade for change of command, October 1998.

408th Intelligence Group (Andrew P. Robinson)

ethnic hatreds, and the proliferation of dangerous weapons.

Fortunately, we know that the co-operation and determination which created NATO and saw us through the Cold War can guide us through the challenges ahead. But while our fundamental security principles endure, our forces must be transformed to suit this

### **Bosnia has demonstrated that the transformation of NATO from a fixed positional defense to a flexible mobile defense is incomplete**

new landscape. We need a new Alliance for the new century, one that allows us to seize opportunities and is designed for the missions ahead. As

Giulio Douhet said, "Victory smiles upon those who anticipate the changes in the character of war, not upon those who wait to adapt themselves after the changes occur."

In addition to marking the anniversary of the most successful military alliance in history, the Washington Summit presents a unique opportunity to focus on transforming the capabilities of the Alliance to meet the defense challenges of the next fifty years. Our experience in Bosnia has not only proven to be a success in humanitarian and geopolitical terms, it has demonstrated that the transformation of NATO from a fixed positional defense to a flexible mobile defense is incomplete. Indeed, Implementation Force (IFOR) and Stabilization Force (SFOR) suggest that should we have to operate outside Alliance territory in the

future, we should anticipate doing so without preexisting communications, logistics, or other infrastructure. To merely maintain a force designed to defend against Warsaw Pact aggression or to make only superficial adjustments would be a dereliction of our duty to the soldiers, nations, and future of the Alliance. We must seize the historic opportunity of the Washington Summit to propel this necessary transformation.

### **A Revised Strategic Concept**

Because our allies are modernizing and restructuring at different rates and observe differing national visions, NATO is not as effective as it should be. To move forward, we must build on the emerging consensus on developing a Common Operational Vision that embraces the concepts to be found in the

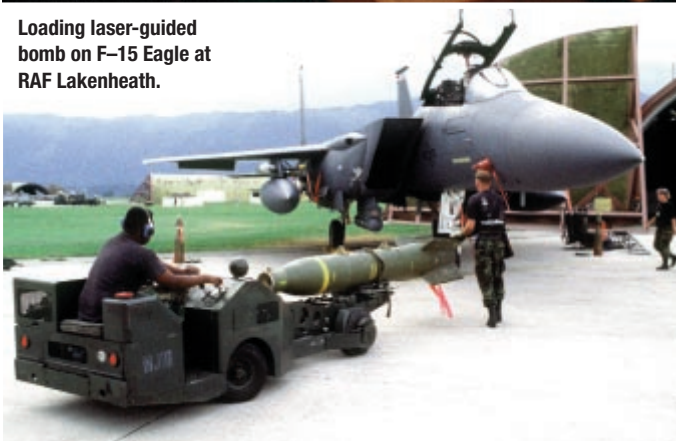


Thirteen-nation NATO combined air operations center, Vincenza.



DOD

Loading laser-guided bomb on F-15 Eagle at RAF Lakenheath.



U.S. Air Force (Paul R. Caron)

new Strategic Concept. We must forge a perspective that incorporates four core capabilities: mobility, effective engagement, survivability, and sustainability. We must be capable of projecting joint forces and joint assistance. We must engage effectively by delivering assets when and where they are needed. We must enhance survivability by protecting allied forces against terrorism and attack by chemical, biological, and electronic weapons. Finally, we must improve sustainability by being able to deliver supplies in any contingency.

novations. In practical terms our immediate focus must be on communications and logistics. A military force is only as effective as its flow of information, and NATO must have a fully interoperable communications capability for the next century to be successful. In the near term, the Washington Summit should agree to develop and implement specific command, control, and communications (C<sup>3</sup>) capabilities for allied forces that are now or may be working together in the future. For the long term, heads of state can approve efforts aimed at drawing up a timetable

for developing and implementing a single integrated C<sup>3</sup> architecture.

With respect to logistics, experience has taught us that static Cold War-style support arrangements are not useful for missions such as IFOR and SFOR since they are not deployable. As a short-term goal of the Washington Summit, individual nations would ensure that their logistics capabilities are as deployable as their force structures. Allied commanders must have the ability to quickly locate and move assets to support their forces. Over the longer term, I have asked the Senior NATO Logisticians Conference to consider creative solutions such as a multinational logistics center.

In addition to transforming our assets and capabilities, we must transform the way we think about operational challenges and move promising concepts from the desktop to the battlefield. To begin the process, we must

*HMS Illustrious alongside  
USS Independence,  
Southern Watch.*



DOD (John Sullivan)

*Hungarian MiG-29 taxiing  
past C-130, Carpathian  
Exchange.*



U.S. Air Force

identify those critical operational challenges we face in each of the core and enabling capabilities. A revised Strategic Concept and innovative summit initiatives on defense capabilities will require equally innovative processes for their implementation. We must prioritize, coordinate, and integrate our work to ensure that the new Strategic Concept results in action that improves both national-level and Alliance defense capabilities. I have suggested that a high level steering group modeled on the Defense Group on Proliferation or the Senior Level Group could act as an effective mechanism. This is not to imply that we should abandon existing committees, but rather that this group ensure that the ideas found in the new Strategic Concept—mobility, effective engagement,

sustainability, and survivability—are better reflected in the day-to-day activities of the C<sup>3</sup> Board and Senior NATO Logisticians Conference. Change re-

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quires a common commitment. Thus the allies can best achieve these goals by learning from one another. Through collaboration, specific recommendations can be considered and implemented in coming years.

Our objective is nothing less than transforming our military capabilities, creating forces that are designed, equipped, and prepared for the 21<sup>st</sup> century and that can be combined into a single, powerful, interoperable unit to carry out any mission directed by the Alliance. These are ambitious goals but they are no more difficult than the many NATO successes over the last fifty years.

We cannot allow this effort to simply be a paper exercise, a flash of rhetoric developed for our anniversary summit that is left to gather dust after the celebration. Good intentions will do little for our soldiers in the field. The Dutch colonel who commands a multinational brigade in a future contingency may not care about what was resolved at the Washington Summit in April 1999, but he will care about the ability of his battalions to work together in battle. The German sergeant who directs supplies of food to ten thousand refugees may not care if our negotiations are conducted in a diplomatically correct manner, but he will care about effective communications with the Turkish transports hauling the supplies. And the Greek platoon leader who targets air support may not care about a statement containing high minded propositions, but he will care about the compatibility of his computer system with that of the French pilot circling overhead.

The lives of our troops and the future success of the Alliance depend on our actions today. I trust that the generation of NATO leaders who gather in 2049 will remember that we stood up and fulfilled our duty

by preparing for tomorrow. As the world changes, we must have the foresight to change with it in

order to bring about another fifty years of progress and cooperation. On that day, all the members of our Alliance will celebrate a full century of peace and stability.

**JFQ**

**This article is adapted from a keynote address presented to a conference entitled "Transforming NATO's Defense Capabilities," which was held on November 13, 1998, in Norfolk, Virginia.**